

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 6NEW YORK POST
9 April 1986

FILE ONLY

Hello, this is your President calling . . .

THE GREAT Communicator has come up with a new wrinkle — computerized automatic telephone dialing that can play a recorded message to half a million of his constituents a day.

When that crucial vote on aid to Nicaragua came up before Congress on March 27, conservative forces targeted eight congressman whose votes were needed.

Excerpts of Reagan's televised address on Nicaragua were spliced together into a 20-second message, which boiled down his pitch for aid to the contras and asked constituents to call their congressmen.

Project '88: Americans for the Reagan Agenda, a conservative lobbying group, then hired Mega-Dial Inc., a telecommunications company founded in Toronto and headquartered in Rockefeller Center.

The day before the vote, Mega-Dial's computers in Fort Lauderdale called 10,000 voters in each of the eight targeted districts — in Pennsylvania, Michigan, Ohio, Wisconsin and Washington State — and played the message.

"It was done in 36 hours," said our source. "The tape was made on Monday. They got the names and numbers from the voter registration lists on Tuesday. And the calls were made on Wednesday. The vote was Thursday."

The basic charge is 50 cents per call, anywhere in the U.S., so the estimated cost of the lobbying effort was \$45,000.

"There were eight congressmen who had said in public they were leaning toward voting with the President, and seven of them turned," said one operative. "It's the most effective lobbying tool we have."

Still, the vote went against Reagan then.

But for next week, when the issue comes up before the House again, Project '88, chaired by former deputy CIA chief Max Hugel, is considering expanding the program to reach 22 congressional districts.

At least two will be in New York, including Rep. Mario Biaggi's in The Bronx. "He's leaning," said our source, who added:

"It's at least 3-to-1 more effective than direct mail. When you pick up the phone and hear, 'Hello, this is President Reagan . . . ' How can you hang up on that?"

Others who have employed the new technology include farmworkers union leader Cesar Chavez, who used it a few weeks ago to raise funds, and Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.), who used a tape prepared by President Reagan to helped him eke out a reelection victory over Democrat Jim Hunt.

Johnson & Johnson plans to use Mega-Dial to calm consumer fears over Tylenol and TV Guide is considering the technology as a way of dunning subscribers who haven't paid up.

Among the big investors in the publicly held company are Abe Margolies, of Abe's Steakhouse, and Leone J. Peters, longtime chairman of Cushman & Wakefield real estate company.

PAGE SIX

By RICHARD JOHNSON
